It Takes Two To Nest

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It Takes Two To Nest

by TheSilverQueen

Summary

When Hannibal hears a commotion down the hall at the hospital, naturally he goes to investigate. When he finds out that the omega patient, a Mr. Will Graham, is struggling so hard that the doctors are having difficulties handling him, naturally he is intrigued. And when he finds out that the on-call OBGYN has been delayed, naturally he steps in to deliver Will's baby himself.

Dr. Hannibal Lecter can do anything, after all. Including deliver someone else's baby while minutes away from going into labor himself.

Also check out Tigerprawn's fanvid here!

Notes

This is my entry to the 2020 Hannigram A/B/O Big Bang! I asked y'all if you wanted sweet snuggling or bloody battling and sweet snuggling won so here it is.

I was partnered with the amazing TigerPrawn who made me a FANVID! Go HERE to see it and then shower him with kudos and likes!!! You matched the tone of my fic beautifully <3 <3 <3

This story was inspired by a real life story where a doctor delivered a baby whilst about to go into labor herself.

See the end of the work for more notes

Prologue

Things Hannibal does like, in no particular order: fine wines, succulent foods, well-tailored clothing, high quality sheets, blankets as soft as clouds, warm fires. All manner of the comfortable and fine things in life.

Things Hannibal does not like, in no particular order: cursing, unfounded accusations, petty gossip, pointless messes. All manner of rudeness that he finds unspeakably, awfully, terribly ugly.

Like, for example, receiving a summons by automated text just before bed.

When Hannibal walks over to the night stand and picks up his phone, he silences the cheery alert noise – which is certainly not his usual text message tone – and thumbs it open to the messages section. The number is not one he is familiar with, but the preview does state *To Hannibal Lecter* followed by his correct date of birth and address, so at the very least he is not on the receiving end of a message not even meant for him.

He opens it, reads the message, and has the urge to dash the phone against the wall or floor. It's a fleeting urge, useless and base, but he still has it.

The next day, he receives the formal letter in the mail. It's addressed the exact same, in that standard government font type, but the seal of government on the envelope is one that every alpha and omega knows equally well and equally dreads. After all, no one likes to be reminded that the government is essentially a third party in married couples and even unmarried, unattached persons. To be exact, the Office of Bonding and Reproduction.

To Hannibal Lecter,

Per the Act of Reproduction passed in 1950, every omega and every alpha is by law required to produce at least one child by age 40, in order to ensure that our population remains at standard levels. Our records reflect that you have not yet produced such a child. Therefore, you are ordered to present yourself within a month's time to the nearest Office of Bonding and Reproduction to be assigned a suitable alpha or present your plans for imminent copulation and delivery. Please contact the OBAR to make an appointment at your earliest convenience.

If you have already successfully delivered a child but not registered this with the OBAR, then you are required to present yourself with this child so that the proper testing and registration can take place.

If you wish to apply for a medical exception, please contact the department of appeals directly. Please note that medical exceptions are rarely granted, and only at the discretion of the board of directors.

We wish you a safe and speedy pregnancy, and thank you in advance for doing your part to keep our country strong.

A trail of signatures follows that last line – board members, almost all alphas, with their black and white photos of smug faces and scrawling, looping signatures. Hannibal is sure that most of them are top contenders on the list of "suitable alphas". After all, while the OBAR does track the genetics of their matches, as long as an omega gets pregnant and successfully delivers a baby, they aren't too fussed about by whom. It's theoretically an omega's choice, and an omega's honor.

Hannibal sets the letter down carefully and tilts the envelope so that the rest of the papers in the thick packet can come out. There's the standard pamphlet emblazoned with the OBAR's logo that lists a brief history and some facts about the OBAR's success rate. There's an informational form about what is required to register a child one has already delivered, and another to apply for a medical exception. Each paper has an obnoxious border of a stork with a diapered baby marching around the edge, and Hannibal feels the brief urge to find the artist and eat them.

Instead he looks into the medical exception requirements. It involves a great deal of medical information, he realizes, along with a battery of tests and physical examinations by three physicians to confirm infertility or inability to carry a child to term.

It is also, he realizes, not worth the trouble. Not to mention that the battery of tests might reveal things he does not wish to be known.

Hannibal sighs and folds that paper apart. He picks up the summons again, dials the number, and makes an appointment for the next week. After all, he might as well get it over with.

The walls of waiting room for the OBAR is, if possible, more obnoxious than the information packet. It's bathed in baby blues and pinks, and storks are everywhere. And the only wall missing storks covered from top to bottom in overly cheery testimonials from gushing omegas and alphas about how having a child and/or mate has changed their lives for the better.

Hannibal, who has eaten many an alpha who sought to court him with the intention of turning him into such a gushing, submissive omega, sits as far away from that wall as possible.

Fortunately, it appears to not be a particularly busy day at the office, so Hannibal is called and led to room within ten minutes. The case worker, an alpha named Adrian Summers, stands to greet him, but he does not shake Hannibal's hand; instead he puts his hand over his heart and bows a little, like the old ways of an alpha greeting an unknown and unfamiliar omega. It's a little touching, right up until Mr. Summers opens his mouth.

"So, I understand from your intake that you have not yet bred?"

Hannibal blinks, just once. He folds his coat more securely in his lap. "I received my summons at the end of last week."

Mr. Summers taps his pen on the desk and shrugs. "Sorry, it's in the script that we ask," he says. "If you had, then I could have provided you information for finding an OBAR approved OBGYN and you could be on your way."

“I see,” Hannibal says, although he really doesn’t. He resolves to remember to ask for the man’s business card.

When he doesn’t say anything else, Mr. Summer gives a little awkward cough and straightens. “So do you plan to file a medical appeal?”

“No.”

“Well, then your remaining options are to either find a suitable alpha or be assigned one. We have specialized centers that can monitor the insemination, if you would like a list?”

“I wasn’t aware that OBAR allowed for artificial insemination.”

“We don’t.” Mr. Summers pauses. “And most omegas are not fond of being watched, even after all of the material has been provided for a suitable nest. But if you are assigned an alpha, then there’s no guarantee that you will find him compatible even if our algorithm says you are, so the occasion must be monitored. For your safety. You understand.”

Even if the words didn’t come out route, Hannibal would know them for a script. With decreasing fertility in the world, many countries are scrambling to collect as much data regarding pregnancies and omega births. It makes sense that monitoring would be one tool.

That being said, not all of the script is wrong.

He sighs. “You are quite correct that I would find that quite distasteful. So my remaining option is to find a suitable alpha?”

“Correct. It can be someone in your social circle, or you can log onto the OBAR database, or I can provide you with a list.”

Hannibal takes one moment to picture asking any of his acquaintances to see him through a heat – to hold him down and put him on his belly, to sink their teeth in his neck and tuck their knot into his body, to leave their sweat and seed and scent on his pristine room – and knows immediately that it won’t be his choice. He has a reputation to maintain, after all.

So: “Does OBAR need to know who I’ve chosen?”

“It’s recommended, but not strictly necessary,” Mr. Summer says slowly. “You are, after all, cooperating, and as long as you faithfully attend your OBGYN appointments and successfully deliver a child, it’s your choice to acknowledge the alpha sire.”

Not the answer Hannibal wanted, but then again, he has spent years cultivating his patience. He waited so long to find Mischa’s killers, after all. He can wait for a few years for the interest to die down and for whatever sire he chooses to sire a few more children before Hannibal feasts upon his flesh.

Hannibal nods to himself. “May I have a list, please?”

The meeting ends rather swiftly after that. Mr. Summers provides him with a list of vetted alpha sires in the area, a list of approved OBGYNs, and then his business card with his work

cell underlined three times. It certainly makes Hannibal's life easier.

Mr. Summers then leads him back to the waiting room, chattering the whole while about his kids and what a joy they are and how OBAR changed his life. The hallways are quite small though, so Hannibal is forced to drop behind Mr. Summers when another case worker or OBAR employee appears at the other end of the hallway. The person following that case worker has a deep frown on his face, shoulders hunched and plenty of layers piled on like he thinks he's going to be eaten alive, and his eyes are on the floor. He doesn't see Hannibal until it's too late, and they brush shoulders, ever so slightly.

Hannibal inhales, because it's instinct. The man is an omega, and his scent is sharp, almost bitter: lemon peeled before ripeness, sauerkraut marinating in salt, apple cider vinegar straight out of the bottle.

It's interesting, as omegas generally have gentler, honeyed scents, in order to better catch alphas.

But then the man keeps moving, not even acknowledging the incident, and Hannibal increases his stride to follow Mr. Summers. After all, he has an alpha to find, and stalk, and wring enough seed out of to sire a child.

He forgets the man and his bitter scent and his deep frown.

Nine Months Later

Hannibal has no desire to sit around at home and wait for days or weeks for his child to decide it's time to finally join the world, so he schedules an induction with the hospital. Fortunately, induction is one of the approved OBAR methods of delivery, as omegas have reliably safe and quick responses to it, and most of the nurses, happy to have a knowledgeable and calm patient on their hands, treat him very well and leave him in peace aside from the occasional visits to check his dilation or give him more ice cubes.

Hannibal is, therefore, quite comfortable buried in a nest of blankets watching an inane program on the television when he becomes aware, faintly, of a series of shouts from outside his room.

Shouts are not uncommon in labor and delivery, of course – family members being forced out of the room, doctors requesting assistance or medication, partners fighting over names – so Hannibal turns up the volume on the television and settles more firmly into his makeshift nest. They are all blankets he purchased and slept with, so they are better than the scratchy hospital ones, but he is still uncomfortably aware that this is not his home or his territory, and so close to birth, there's little he can do to reason with his hyped up omega instincts.

The intercom comes on, blaring a page for attending OBGYN. Hannibal recognizes the name, sort of, but it's not his OBGYN, so he lets it go.

Five minutes later, there is a call for the on-call OBGYN.

Ten minutes later, there is a code OA called out, and Hannibal cocks his head. A code OA is for an omega or alpha is severe distress, and there are few reasons for them to be in such distress in the labor and delivery ward. But it still is strange that no OBGYN has responded; Hannibal remembers seeing dozens of residents running after OBGYN attendings like baby ducklings whenever they were called to consult in the emergency rom.

The shouting grows louder and more alarmed; a parade of footsteps races down the room.

Hannibal sighs and heaves himself out of his bed. He's curious of course, but he tells himself that really he wants to know if his own OBGYN will be waylaid to deal with this emergency as he slowly walks over to the door.

"Pardon me," he says to the nearest patient care assistant, "but what seems to be the problem?"

"Ah, Mr. Lecter, um – "

"Dr. Lecter," Hannibal corrects, not unkindly, and watches her expression change as she absorbs the new information.

"The main attending OBGYN was called to an emergency C-section, and the on-call OBGYN got into an accident on the way here," the PCA explains.

"Omegas generally have smooth deliveries. Was there a complication?"

"I think so. I'm not responsible for that part of the ward."

As she speaks, a nurse darts out of a room down the wall and sprints at full speed down the hallway, looking as spooked as if he had seen the devil. When he passes them, Hannibal catches a whiff of scent: the ripeness of birth, the wet fur of dogs, and bitterness.

Hannibal thinks back to the man in the office, omega like him, and not young either, and is too curious to remain where he is.

He dips briefly back into his room, discarding his sketchbook and turning off his television. He scoops up a comfortable hospital robe, dark blue and soft as sin, and ties it expertly around him; hospital gowns rarely leave one with a great deal of dignity after all. Then he sets off slowly down the hall, dodging nurses and clinging to the wall, as if heading towards the bathroom. Fortunately, only a few doors down from the bathroom is the source of the commotion.

The first thing Hannibal notices is the smell. There is agitation and rage and confusion and *fear*. Hannibal drinks it in, this beautiful cocktail of human emotion. Normally he can't smell such things except on a hunt, or during the days of really dangerous surgery. It's lovely.

The next thing Hannibal notices is the sight. The omega on the bed is thrashing as the nurses and patient care assistants try to hold him down, but he's so heavily pregnant that they're clearly wary of using their full strength. And the most powerful sedatives and chemical restraints would be of the ultimate last resort against an omega in labor. It's a captivating

sight, seeing this omega fight and kick and claw like a fish on the line, wriggling and jerking, doing everything he can.

The last thing that Hannibal notices is the *sound*. The omega is growling, snarling, yelling, incoherent threats and screams, enough that if the medical staff weren't wearing suppressants and nose-deadening masks, they'd all be on their knees begging for forgiveness. Hannibal himself can feel the temptation, because an angered omega is already a powerful warning; an enraged, cornered, and pregnant omega is enough to send even the strongest alphas packing and baring their throats.

It's a sight that is everything Hannibal was specifically taught in medical school *not* to allow to escalate so badly.

It's absolutely the most glorious thing he's ever seen. After all, most pregnant omegas have the instinct to flee, to protect, to cower. Very few have the instinct to *fight*.

Hannibal doesn't intend to intervene, of course. He is very close to his own delivery, and at most he came looking for entertainment and an answer to the commotion. But then he overhears two of the nurses discussing sedation despite the risks and calling in a physician to approve the order, and well. Hannibal can't have that.

Hannibal sighs, tightens the knot on his robe, straightens his shoulders, lets the *Dr. Hannibal Lecter* mask slide on, and wades into the fray.

The first thing Hannibal does is introduce himself. It's mostly for the sake of the other providers in the room, but he can see how the omega on the bed shies from him, so he knows Hannibal is there, at least. And that's fine; he's used to repeating himself to patients.

Most of the nurses scatter after that. They have dozens of other patients to care for, after all, and problematic patients are not at all what any providers wants after a long day's shift.

The omega, seeing an opportunity, immediately hops off the bed, stumbling as his bare feet meet cold, bare floors, and sequesters himself in the corner. He wraps his arms around his enormous belly, swaying ever so slightly, and growls a warning at Hannibal.

Hannibal smiles politely and picks up the patient's chart. It's not much – most of the documentation is in the electronic chart – but the prenatals are enough for Hannibal to determine the important things, like the fact that the omega's name is Will Graham, he's only a little younger than Hannibal, he doesn't have any major allergies, and this is his first pregnancy. He also apparently scratched the hell out of his first OBGYN, who had to tie him down for the ultrasound requested by OBAR.

Of course, the other benefit of Hannibal seemingly not paying attention to him is that Mr. Graham is slowly but surely calming down. His scent becomes less of a whirlwind of spices and more of the rich creamy note of babies and labor. When he is finally calm enough that he is no longer wheezing, Hannibal slips the chart back into the folder on the wall and looks up, opening his mouth to introduce himself.

Mr. Graham beats him to it. “You know,” he rasps, “I’m pretty sure you’re not allowed to just waltz in and read confidential medical information.”

Hannibal can feel a reluctant smile pull at his lips. He folds his hands over his belly and says, “I’m Dr. Hannibal Lecter. Nice to meet you . . . ?”

An arched eyebrow is his response.

Hannibal doesn’t move. It’s one thing, after all, to learn information from a dry, bland medical report. It’s another to be trusted with an omega’s name, and more importantly, to learn how they wish to be addressed.

“Will,” comes the muttered response, the man in question kicking at the floor, a slow flush conquering his face. “Will Graham.”

“As I understand it, the on-call OBGYN is on their way, but they got into an accident. And the attending OBGYN is handling an emergency. Do you mind if I take over caring for you?”

Will gives him a look that clearly says he wants to jump out a window, but is wary of the long drop below. “This baby’s coming out whether I want it to or not,” he says through gritted teeth. “What does it matter who yanks it out?”

Hannibal hums. “Well, the other OBGYNs are alphas, if you would prefer that.”

As he suspected, a look of deep suspicion and revulsion passes over Will’s face. Medicine is an alpha-dominated field, and obstetrics is no exception. And most alphas aren’t awful, since every alpha has at least a drop of the instinct to coddle children and protect the next generation, but it’s very different when an alpha says “Stop whining and push” and when a fellow omega does.

Or when they dismiss pain. Hannibal ate one who did without even listening or trying to diagnose the problem. He made sure it was a very, very painful death.

But Will, it turns out, is a rather suspicious person all around, because he squints at Hannibal and points an accusing finger his way. “You look about ready to pop too,” he remarks. “Isn’t it, I don’t know, dangerous?”

“Why? Are you planning to kill me?”

“No,” Will says quickly. Too quickly.

Hannibal doesn’t dignify that with a response. Instead he settles onto the rolling chair and gestures at the sink. “Wash your hands, then, if you please. And perhaps splash a little water on your face.”

“And then?”

“And then I will see how dilated you are, and we can proceed from there.”

“You don’t want to mask or restrain me?”

“Generally, that is considered unwise,” Hannibal says, watching as Will skirts around him, putting as much distance as he can between them, a wary animal to the core. “If an omega does not feel safe, their body will focus more on protecting them and their baby than delivering the baby. That splitting of focus can only harm both mother and child. Not to mention, if you need to scream, please do; the energy must go somewhere.”

Will scoffs, although it’s a bit muffled as he cups water and throws it on his face. “That wasn’t why they wanted to mask me.”

“Well, you’ll be lying on the bed and I’ll be between your legs,” Hannibal says dryly. “If you are flexible enough to sit up and sink your teeth in me anyways, I’ll take the bite as a badge of honor."

Will gives him another look, half contemplating jumping out the window and half clearly wanting to call Hannibal crazy, but the words seem to settle something in him. His shoulders relax, just a little bit, and he doesn’t resist when Hannibal gestures towards the bed. He’s by no means as relaxed as he should be, but it’s better than when he was shouting and thrashing and fighting with tooth and claw.

And just in the nick of time, because when Hannibal finally maneuvers Will into the stirrups and takes a peek, he can see the baby’s head crowning.

“Ah,” Hannibal says.

“What? Is something wrong?”

“No, but I may need to call more people in here to assist me.”

There’s a ripping sound; Will must have torn a bedsheet in his anxiety. Hannibal can smell it, those bitter notes mixing into his scent. “I thought you were going to take over.”

“I am one person,” Hannibal tells him, pushing to his feet and moving towards the door. “And we will need others to assist in doing the baby’s first checks and ensuring that you are in good health as well. And we might need a lactation consultant as well, since this is your first pregnancy. And – ”

“Alright, you know what?” Will interrupts, looking slightly overwhelmed. His eyes are glazed down, sweat matting his curls to his face, and his face is contorted in pain as the contractions sink in now that his adrenaline rush has faded. “You just – do your thing. I’m gonna – I’m gonna just – stay here.”

“Thank you very much,” Hannibal says.

“In the fairness of disclosure and honesty,” Hannibal muses, as Will pushes and scrabbles at the sheets and pants, “I suppose I should tell you that it has been a while since I delivered a child.”

“WHY YOU – ”

The rest of Will's curse-laden response is cut off by the wailing of his newborn baby, the anger giving him the momentum for the final push, and Hannibal finds that he doesn't even mind being called names that normally would earn the speaker an immediate death.

How could he, when Will looks at him like he wants to rend him apart with his bare hands, to tear out his throat with his teeth and display his bones as a warning for any who would dare to trespass?

No one has ever looked at Hannibal like that. He's been feared, of course. Provoked anger. Been on the receiving end of hatred. But no one has ever looked like they'd actually *act* on it, give into their beautiful natural instinct and fight him, to set their strength against his and see who emerges the final, bloody winner.

It's beautiful.

It's arousing.

It's –

"Dr. Lecter, your water has broken!"

Hannibal looks down, sees a steadily growing pool of water, and clears his throat. "Excuse me, Will," he says, as politely as he can, "I'm afraid I have a little emergency of my own to tend to."

Will gives him the stink eye. It's as good of a dismissal as Hannibal knows he'll get.

But then, just as Hannibal steps over the threshold, heading back to his room, he hears the softest, quietest, little purr, and Will says, "Thank you, Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal smiles the whole way through his delivery.

Hannibal eventually visits Will, a few days later. It's hard to tear himself away from his own daughter, because an omega's mothering instincts are very powerful, but omega instincts to submit and to placate are strong too, and Hannibal overrides those every time he sinks his teeth into an alpha, so he settles his daughter down, slides into a robe, and walks down to Will's room.

Will is inside, but so is a nurse. The nurse is saying something in a sweet voice, cooing over the baby Will has cradled tight to his chest, but from the look of Will's face, it's more akin to torture.

And Hannibal has seen the faces of people being tortured.

He clears his throat, very lightly, and is pleased when Will's eyes sharpen and focus upon him. He likes it even better when Will parts his lips, ever so slightly, and bears his fangs at him.

It's rude, shockingly rude, and he doesn't mind at *all*.

“Dr. Lecter!” says the nurse. Her name is Anna, and she’s new – she chattered to Hannibal all morning already, and cooed over his own daughter. He can already see the stars in her eyes from when she found out he delivered Will’s child right before delivering his own. “Mr. Graham, this is the doctor who – ”

“Yanked a baby out of me, I’m aware,” Will interrupts dryly. He tilts his head. “So how come you get to walk around unescorted and I have to be in a wheelchair with five nurses hovering around me?”

“Mr. Graham, I’ve already explained – ”

“And I want to hear it from my doctor,” Will says. “Since he’s apparently my doctor.”

Anna flushes a deep red, rubbing her hands together nervously. She’s just a beta, and she can’t pick up on the scent of Will’s annoyance and aggression, but she isn’t blind either. Hannibal shifts to the side, giving her a clear shot at the door, and she takes it with the grace of someone who knows they’re no longer wanted.

“May I come in?”

Will waves a hand. “You really need an invitation?”

“Well, normally, doctors try to knock first,” Hannibal says, before he crosses into the room and settles on the plush couch by the window. Or, rather, just the couch – it’s rather less plush than it looks.

Will, watching with a quiet sense of amusement, says, “Yeah, that’s way less comfortable than it looks. Trust me. I spent an hour on it this morning. Relocated to bed.”

“I see. And how do you feel?”

“Oh no, no, no,” Will says immediately. “I’ve already seen a shrink today, I am not taking any more shrink questions.”

Hannibal raises an eyebrow. Being evaluated by psychiatrist is not standard procedure for an omega delivering a healthy baby, and he saw no flags on Will’s record from the Department of Children & Families or OBAR. Sometimes omegas do give up their children for adoption after they’ve satisfied their requirement, but Will wouldn’t be holding his child now if he had starting those proceedings.

Then again, Will did cause a frightful commotion and nearly was restrained and sedated and masked, so perhaps the psychiatric evaluation was not so surprising.

Still, he senses this is a touchy topic for Will, so he shifts on the couch and says, “I meant physically, Will. I can leave the matters of the mind for those qualified to assess it. It is not my habit to step into a role I do not belong to.”

Will gives him a look. Hannibal might almost call it coy, but for the fact that there remains a deep seated flare of suspicion inside Will’s eyes. “Really? Because I talked around, Dr. Lecter,” Will reveals, the smooth tones of his voice sliding over Hannibal’s name like a fish

gliding through waves, “and it turns out you’re not an OBGYN. Not an on-call, not a resident, not even a fellow. You most certainly stepped into a role when you became my attending.”

“A thorough investigation,” Hannibal concedes. “But not quite complete. I have delivered a few children during my days in the emergency room.”

“Or you just wanted to get a look at what the fuss was.”

Hannibal lifts a shoulder and drops it. He knows his scent won’t betray fear or deceit, because he has no regrets, and he learned long ago to control his scent. A doctor who can’t is next to useless in the operating theater, and Hannibal would never dare be anything less than the best. “Habit. Normally when a patient screams, everyone comes in to help.”

“When the rabbit screams,” Will replies, “the fox comes, but not to help.”

Hannibal can’t help his wide grin at that. He doesn’t think Will has managed to peer through his mask, but either he’s got a hell of a detective mind or his instincts are stronger than anyone Hannibal’s ever met.

“I prefer to think of myself as a more of a helpful clever fox than a ravenous one.”

“The cleverer the fox, the better his dinner,” Will says. “What do you think of me as, then?”

Hannibal tilts his head. The suspicion has dissipated from Will’s scent; all Hannibal smells now is the soft scent of newborn baby, the sharp antiseptic of the hospital, and a deeper, richer scent, like honey roasted meats. He thinks back to Will in the delivery suite, screaming and scratching, desperate to be free, snarling and dangerous and fierce.

“A mongoose,” Hannibal says. “A mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by.”

Both of their eyes go to the baby sleeping fitfully in Will’s arms. Omegas are, after all, demanded to produce a child, but they are not required to raise that child. Such a burden is considered unfair, not to mention financially taxing. Many omegas who do not want children or cannot care properly for them surrender them to OBAR, so that they can be placed with wealthy families who can afford and do want children. In the past, OBAR representatives had been called snakes, whispering to omegas like the serpent in Eden, urging them to eat of the fruit and bear a child and then be cast out and forgotten, no longer of interest to OBAR when they, in turn, came calling for assistance after fulfilling their duty of reproduction.

After a long moment, Will clears his throat and says, “Do you want to hold her?”

Hannibal is startled, of course. Most omegas are fiercely protective of their children once the bond has been established, and most nurses and providers don protective gear and douse themselves in suppressants to ensure that babies are not confused and forget who their parents are. But Hannibal is not ignorant of the offer and what it implies, so he quickly stands.

Will's child is small, smaller than his own. Her hair is darker, but the physician in Hannibal notes that she is breathing well, sleeping well, all of her limbs tucked tidily into her blanket.

"She is beautiful," Hannibal says, stroking a finger over her tiny head. "What is her name?"

"Mina."

"It's very nice to meet you, Mina," Hannibal says seriously, before he passes her back to Will's arms.

"What about your baby?"

"A girl. Safely delivered. She's in my suite."

Will's eyebrow goes up. "You have a suite?" he asks, gesturing with one hand at his tiny room, which has barely enough space for a person to walk five paces and touch the wall if they want exercise.

"Yes," Hannibal says, and nothing else. If Will can deduce so much about him, he surely can tell that Hannibal is not wearing thin paper hospital gowns and stale robes like he is, but comfortable clothes of his own. Not all of that can be attributed to his status as a physician at this hospital.

Will whistles lowly. "So I guess the OBAR rep hasn't come by for you yet?"

"No. Have they come for you?"

"Yeah. Day after Mina was born. I kicked them out," Will says slyly, a vicious edge to his words. "They said they'd come back, and I told them next time I'd throw them out a window."

Hannibal wishes he could have seen it. "Well, then, Mr. Mongoose, might I propose a new arrangement?"

"What's that, Mr. Fox?" Will asks, eyes dancing.

"Why don't we face the snakes together?"

Hannibal has to pull more than a few strings to make things happen, but he is a well-respected physician and Will has no objection and there are more than a few other omegas ready to deliver in a few days' time, so after some stern lectures and many, many questions asked of Will, they eventually agree to move Will into Hannibal's suite, cradle and bed and duffel bag.

Will whistles lowly when he is wheeled in. "Damn, no wonder you turned your nose up at my room."

Hannibal shrugs. "If I am going to be admitted, I am going to be comfortable," is all he says.

Will gives him a look. “This is more than comfortable. That’s a flat screen television. And that bathroom is bigger than my whole room was. And you have two couches and a desk.”

“Do you wish to return to your own room?”

“Hell no, this is awesome,” Will laughs, and promptly sprawls out on the large couch.

A small whine splits the air, testy and needy, and both Will and Hannibal spring to their feet. The nurses had pushed the cradles together, in between the two large beds underneath a spotlight that guarantees warmth during the day and near a heater that guarantees warmth during the night. In due time, they’ll be able to distinguish their children by sound as well as scent, but for now, it takes a few moments for Will to realize that it is Hannibal’s daughter crying and not his own.

It turns out that she is hungry, so Hannibal settles on the edge of his bed and slides off the shoulder of his robe, tucking his daughter to his breast so that she can feed.

Will looks at them, face soft. “She’s beautiful,” Will says quietly, echoing Hannibal. “What’s her name?”

Hannibal has to swallow twice before he can speak. He named her on a whim, on the surge of adrenaline and excitement, mind blurred by the pain and the joy. Had he been in more control, he would have controlled his tongue. But the nurse had asked, and he had answered, and then it was too late to take it back, even if every utterance of the name by a cheerful nurse or doctor had been like a heated iron to Hannibal’s heart.

“Mischa,” Hannibal says, finally, looking at her and not Will. “I named her Mischa.”

Will’s clever mind clearly doesn’t need Hannibal to spell out that there is some painful memory there, even though none of the nurses have picked up on it. Instead, Will leans back on his own bed and hums, scratching at his chin.

“Mischa and Mina. Like twins,” he muses. “They were even born only minutes apart, I think. It’s fitting.”

Somehow, this – this speculation of the future, rather than questions about or dwelling upon the past – is exactly what Hannibal needed to hear. The painful grip around Hannibal’s heart eases; his lungs expand and his vision clears. He takes a deep breath and raises Mischa to burp her over his shoulder.

“Already planning a life of mischief for our daughters?”

Will shrugs. “Well, one of their fathers nearly bit off man’s face and the other tricked his way into delivering a baby when he was supposed to be going into labor, so you can’t tell me they won’t be troublemakers of some kind.”

“Well, we’ll just have to make sure they aren’t caught,” Hannibal says lightly, “Officer Graham.”

“I will handcuff you to that bed.”

“What, no face biting for me?” Hannibal teases. He could point out that Will’s belongings would have been searched when he was admitted, and any such things would have been confiscated, but it’s far more enjoyable, he is realizing, to let Will just be Will.

Will snorts. “You’re too slippery for that. If I wanted to hurt you, I’d kill with my bare hands.”

And Hannibal just gave birth, he shouldn’t go into heat for at least a year and shouldn’t have sex for six months and most certainly should not get aroused – and yet. And *yet*.

And yet Hannibal gazes upon this beautiful, fierce, perceptive man, and thinks he might be falling in love.

When the OBAR representative swaggers in, adoption consent papers in his hands and an oily smile on his face, they do not throw him out the window (Will’s preference) or slice him apart and roast him alive and dine upon his bones (Hannibal’s preference), but the alpha does leave with urine-stained pants and with a face so pale it’s like he’s been exsanguinated, so Hannibal counts it a victory.

Will laughs so hard that he hiccups for two hours afterwards.

Since Hannibal is both a well-respected physician and a rather wealthy man in his own right, he had no qualms about taking a lengthy maternity leave. He had signed the papers with a smile on his face, already imagining what he could do with that time and a beautifully ready-made alibi. Obviously he would still devote all of his time and energy to his daughter, but, well, no one judges an omega who employs a babysitter once in a while. Everyone needs a break.

Will, Hannibal learns at about 2 AM on a Saturday morning, apparently did not have such a luxury.

It goes down something like this:

Their daughters wake up, crying and whining, around midnight. Will and Hannibal usually take it in shifts for who is dozing and who is passed out sleeping, waking the other when necessary, and tonight it is Hannibal’s turn to doze. He wakes Will when Mina is not soothed by Hannibal’s careful rocking or humming, and together they slump into the little nest they have made by pushing together the two sofas. By instinct, it is easier to feel safer with the thick, high back of the couch on either side of them, and they cocoon their daughters in the middle as they feed and burp them. Will nods off after Mina is settled, but Hannibal remains wide awake, tending to Mischa. When Mina is full, she no longer objects to Hannibal cuddling her close. It is strange, Hannibal knows, to show such favor to a child that is not biologically his when his own child is here, but Hannibal feels no impulse to push Will or Mina away, and he knows Will similarly rocks and soothes both Mischa and Mina to sleep when it is his turn to remain awake.

It is the old way, the forgotten way, the abandoned way. Omegas used to raise children together, in groups, not minding who had born who and treating all as their own. It had also often been because of aggressive, domineering alphas collecting scores of omegas and breeding them all to establish their bloodline, which is where most of the negative associations had come about, but right now, watching Mischa and Mina sleep and Will snuffle against the couch, Hannibal can see why some omegas were content with the situation.

And then their peace is shattered when their door slams open and the light is abruptly flicked on. Hannibal sits bolt upright, because he knows that it is not time for the mid-morning vitals checks, and Will flails and smacks his head against the couch because they both scent the smell of angry alpha.

The alpha is tall, dressed in a dark blue suit, balding and face creased with worry. He has a gun on his hip, a briefcase in his hands, and his eyes go straight to Will.

Will speaks first. “What the hell, Jack?” he snaps, rubbing at his eyes. “I’m on maternity leave.”

“I need you,” this Jack says, unyielding as rock. “There was a murder at – who is this?”

Will rolls his eyes. “Oh, *now* you notice the civilian,” he mutters. He tentatively nudges Mina closer to Hannibal, and Hannibal obligingly scoops her up, letting her breathe in the mixed scent of Will-and-Hannibal that has permeated their clothing. Then Will climbs out of their little nest and stomps over to Jack, irritation in every line of his body.

The conversation they have might have been indecipherable to anyone else, but Hannibal has always had unparalleled senses. Besides, echoes carry in hospital rooms.

“Victim was found strung up in a tree,” Jack is saying, brandishing some photos at Will like a weapon. “Decorated with bows and tinsel, eyes removed, hands cut off. It’s obviously the Ripper.”

Hannibal raises an eyebrow before he can help himself. He most certainly hasn’t struck in the last eight months.

At least, not when he’s left a display out.

Will snorts a derisive laugh. “This is so obviously not the Ripper that I cannot believe you woke me up at 2AM for this,” he says. “Where’s the surgical removal of organs or body parts? I can *see* the jagged edges of where they dug around in his head for the eyes. And – and the Ripper would not use dollar store tinsel, Jack.”

“His kidney’s gone too,” Jack says, like it’s the smoking gun.

“And that incision is way neater than the rest of the damage. This guy probably had surgery at some point. By an actual physician. Go home, Jack. This is not the Ripper. It’s some angry dude with an inflated ego who probably watched a murder mystery and wanted to try and disguise the fact that he need the victim by taking his hands. Fortunately, there is a magical

thing called teeth. Use those. And see if any dollar store got robbed recently, there's still a tag on that tinsel."

Jack still looks reluctant to take Will's word, but after casting a sharp glance to Hannibal and the baby Hannibal is holding, he closes the folder shut with an audible snap. He says, "So when are you coming back? We need you, Will."

"Well, HR has been dying to make me use my accumulated vacation time, so who knows. You signed off on this anyways."

"I didn't have a choice. OBAR requirements overrule anything."

"OBAR also requires maternity leave to raise the resulting child."

"Not if you find a suitable caretaker."

Will's face darkens. He doesn't move a muscle in his body, but his scent thickens and sharpens, like gasoline splashed onto kindling. He bares his teeth. "Are you saying I'm not suitable?" he says, each word like a tiny needle. "Because I have to remind that if I'm suitable enough to dive into the heads of your killers, I'm suitable enough to take a well-deserved break and raise my child."

Jack looks away, then. He swallows and seems no response to that, so he just spins on his heel and leaves.

It's not an apology, though, and both Will and Hannibal know it.

Will stands there for a long time after Jack has departed, quivering like he's bursting apart at the seams, almost like he wants to run after Jack and strangle him instead. It's like watching a tiger whose hunting instincts have been triggered trying desperately to mediate instead of stalk.

Hannibal knows immediately that he would rather see Will free to give into his instincts than restrained like this.

He holds out a hand and says softly, "Will."

Will whirls on him, teeth bared and his eyes aflame, but whatever he sees in Hannibal's face quiets him. He closes his eyes and blows out a long breath, crumpling in on himself like a melting candle. Then he climbs into their nest, looking distinctively uncomfortable.

"I'm uh. Sorry about that."

"I gather it was not your fault."

Will sighs. "It sort of is," he says. "That was my boss, Jack Crawford. Well, my part-time boss. He's, uh, the head of the BAU. For the FBI."

Hannibal raises an eyebrow. Will's intake forms had indicated he worked as a cop, not as a member of the FBI. This is not to say that Hannibal might not have tried to befriend him

anyways, since the allure of bewitching a member of law enforcement would have been the same, but he certainly wasn't expecting it.

"Are you working together on a case?" Hannibal asks politely.

"No. Not really. He's trying to recruit me. He says I have a gift."

All at once, it clicks in Hannibal's mind. He's heard stories about a particularly gifted profiler, although he never learned the name. But it can't be a coincidence that FBI is pulling together a special unit to handle the Ripper and Will is working on, or at least being recruited to work on, the Ripper case by the head of the BAU himself.

"I see you've heard of me," Will mutters darkly. "I'm a regular bucket of crazy – now you know. Regret inviting me into your room?"

There's a world of loathing in that question, and Hannibal understands then that Will does not just bottle up his own natural and very beautiful dark impulses, but that he also considers himself absolutely crazy for having them. It's a travesty, honestly. Hannibal has found little gems before, sparking chips of diamond that he refined and sent on their way to be part of a larger set, but Will . . . Will is fire and grace, carbon hardened under pressure and heat to be the finest of jewels, rough cut edges begging for Hannibal to smooth and polish.

Hannibal shrugs, as casually as he can. "We both have seen terrible things, in our line of work," he replies. "And I have seen nothing in our days together to make me regret befriending you, Will."

"Just you wait. Anyways, go back to sleep. It's my turn to stay awake."

"Will – "

"Shut up and go to sleep, Hannibal. Just because you like to pretend you only need four hours doesn't mean it's true."

Hannibal, instead, decides to change the subject. "We are likely going to be discharged tomorrow. Do you have a place to go?"

"Yes. Technically." At Hannibal's sharp-edged look, Will adds, "Mina came early, okay? I'm not – my place isn't fully baby-proofed yet."

"Then allow me to extend an invitation. I live not far from here, and I have more than enough space for you and Mina. That will allow you time to recover and properly outfit your home. And," Hannibal continues, ignoring Will's protesting noises, "it will allow me some time to catch up on sleep if we continue the same routine we have fallen into here."

Will hesitates. It's clear to Hannibal now that he has a strong desire to help people, and although he is perceptive enough to realize that Hannibal is pressing that button, it does not mean he can avoid it. Instinct can be such a beautifully irrational thing.

"Why?"

“Because you are my friend,” Hannibal says simply. “And we can help each other.”

Hannibal isn’t sure which argument wins Will over, but it doesn’t really matter. What matters is that when they are discharged the next day and the physician asks where Will is going, he jerks a thumb over his shoulder at Hannibal and says, “To stay with Dr. Fancy Pants.”

Will, funnily enough, does not stare when the cab drops them off at Hannibal’s house. He doesn’t stare as they walk up his long driveway and meticulously cultivated garden or throughout Hannibal opening the various locks and disarming the security system (robbers may be delivery, but Hannibal has standards even for delivery) or even when Hannibal directs him to put his coat in the walk in closet in the entry way.

He does, however, come to a dead stop in front of the painting of Leda and the swan that Hannibal has over the dining room table.

“Really?”

Hannibal shrugs, careful not to disturb Mischa. “It is an excellent conversation starter.”

Will gives him a look. “I’m surprised anyone can hold conversation while under that gaze,” he says. “Or eat.”

“I’ve been told my food is excellent.”

“Well, if your kitchen is any indication, I suppose they might be right,” Will says, sounding very put upon. But his eyes are sparkling and his scent is light, mint and lemon, so Hannibal knows he is teasing. “You got a bed in this mansion?”

“It is hardly a mansion.”

“I bet you have four bedrooms and more bathrooms than any human needs.”

“Five, actually.”

Will snorts so loudly that he wakes Mina and has to spend a few minutes cuddling her close. For all of his declarations of being terrible at child-rearing and not knowing what to do, he seems to have fallen right into a pattern of caring for her. He still looks to Hannibal sometimes for advice, but what new parent does not? And Hannibal can acknowledge that it soothes some deep, dark instinctual side of him to know that he can turn to Will for assistance.

A pack of two is tiny, perhaps, but Hannibal will take it.

Of course, Hannibal had not planned to bring any guest home, and while he normally has bedrooms prepared, he had planned to seclude himself for a few months with Mischa. Therefore, as he brings Will up the stairs, he points out a nearby bedroom but tells Will, “I’m afraid I didn’t have any time to prepare it.”

“Oh no, the mighty Doctor Lecter failed to see into the future,” Will says, rolling his eyes. “You have a perfectly serviceable couch, I can use that.”

“That’s hardly comfortable,” Hannibal scolds, opening the door to his bedroom. “Besides, my bed is big enough for two.”

Will doesn’t reply for a few seconds, but his eyes are as big as saucers as he takes in Hannibal’s bedroom, so Hannibal just smiles and walks in. A push of a button has the fireplace roaring to life; omegas prefer warmer temperatures, and Hannibal had no reason to limit his creature comforts. He points out the en suite bathroom to Will, and the walk in closet, and the flat screen television with a mini bar and mini fridge. And then, before Will can muster himself to truly protest, Hannibal leads him to the interior sanctum.

It’s traditional for omegas to have interior sanctums off of the bedroom they share with an alpha. For the omega, it is reassurance that any intruder must go through the alpha’s bedroom and, usually, the alpha before they are reached in an emergency. For the alpha, it is reassurance that the omega cannot sneak another alpha into their bed without leaving a scent trail throughout the bedroom. Even though he was unmated, Hannibal’s architect had not batted an eye over including a luxuriously interior sanctum, complete with a hidden and heavily secured door.

When Hannibal presses his fingerprint to the sensor hidden behind the bookcase and the door slides seamless open, Will finally finds his voice.

“Wow, I thought only super rich weirdos had these,” he says, his voice trembling as he tries to remain casual. “Is this uh . . . is this where you made the nursery?”

Hannibal nods. There is only one bassinet in here for now, but Hannibal ordered another with express shipping; by tonight, both of their children can sleep in the most secure room in his entire house. The power runs on a separate generator, the ventilation is sealed from the rest of the house, and it is fireproof and bullet proof. Hannibal had spared no expense.

Of course, there is another reason why interior sanctums with hidden doors are attributed mostly to the wealthy. Any house can be designed to have interconnected bedrooms; but a house with a security system and hidden interior sanctum, well. . .

As Hannibal sets Mischa down in her bassinet, tucking her in and making sure she won’t roll over into a pillow, Will clears his throat from where he’s making a barrier of pillows around Mina.

“Are you some kind of long lost royal prince?”

“No.”

“Why don’t I believe you?”

“I am not a prince,” Hannibal says, straightening and making eye contact to show sincerity. It usually works; Hannibal has been told many times that he has an excellent command of his facial expressions.

Will, however, squints at him. He tilts his head and his whole body goes still. Hannibal is not sure where he goes in his mind when he assumes this stance, but he knows it means Will is using his beautiful gift to gather unspoken, tiny clues and fit them together to form one cohesive puzzle, reading body language and vocal tones as easily as an adult reads the alphabet.

“Fine, so you’re not a prince,” Will says slowly. “But you are something. And don’t tell me you just inherited a lot of money. This kind of interior sanctum is very traditional. No windows? Sealed ventilation? Wireless emergency phone? So . . . nobility, at least.”

Hannibal looks at Will, at the way he’s almost bracing himself, like he thinks Hannibal might strike him with words or fists, and laments the company he has been keeping. In the olden days, Will would have been treasured as a seer, an advisor, a prophet, and dozens would have come to vie for his hand so that his gifts could be passed onto the kings and queens that he would bear.

So Hannibal demurs, “It’s only a minor title” and then leads them out of the room to find food before Will’s bright laughter wakes their children up.

Hannibal has lived alone for so long that he had initially prepared himself for some awkwardness. There was the planned awkwardness, of course, of sharing space with a baby, but now he also finds himself facing the challenge that is living with Will Graham.

Or, rather, he would, if it were anyone but Will.

Will perches on a stool in the kitchen, and the intrusion into his domain would normally irritate Hannibal but Will does not pass judgment or steal food; he merely asks insightful questions and cracks jokes about whatever Hannibal is doing. Will digs into his meal the second Hannibal places the plates down, and the refusal to politely wait another five minutes for Hannibal to arrange everything and explain the dishes would normally irritate Hannibal, but Will is full of praise for the meal and it is charming to see that he is not faking enjoyment simply because of the expensive ingredients or elaborate preparation. Will takes his dessert and wanders into Hannibal’s studies, and the blatant crossing of boundaries would normally irritate Hannibal, but Will shows a genuine interest in his books and they talk until dessert is finished and it is time for bed.

They settle Mina and Mischa down, and Hannibal sets up the baby monitor, mostly because Will takes one look at it, rolls his eyes, and pushes it in his direction.

Then as they exit the nursery, for the first time, Will hesitates.

“Will? What’s wrong?”

“Um,” Will says, fiddling with the hem of his shirt. “I didn’t ask earlier, sorry, but where should I sleep?”

Hannibal’s first instinct is to offer Will one of the many guest rooms in the house. Even though Hannibal hasn’t had company over for a while, preferring to nest in peace and

solitude, he keeps every room in his house presentable and ready. It's part of his daily routine, and it's soothing to dust and vacuum and mop. And there are plenty of spare sheets and pillows for Will to organize upon any bed into a suitable nest.

But then he remembers their sleeping daughters, and Will surely does not want to put the onus entirely upon Hannibal to tend to them if they wake up in the middle of the night. Hannibal wouldn't mind, of course, but Will is too independent and proud for that.

Then again, Hannibal's bed is rather large.

"Well," Hannibal says slowly, "I would offer you the guest room, but – "

"Our daughters," Will finishes with a sigh, because clearly he has had the same thoughts as Hannibal. "I could take Mina into my room with me."

Part of Hannibal bristles at that. It's instinct to keep children close and safe together, easier to protect. The other part of him is simply practical in his resistance; they just put Mina to sleep, and if Will tries to move her, they'll likely have two screaming babies on their hands for the next few hours.

So Hannibal says, "We've shared a room before and not killed each other. Why not continue the practice?"

Will's eyebrow goes up. He doesn't appear offended, but he does seem to think it over. And then, quite suddenly, he grins and says triumphantly, "Ah hah! So the great Dr. Lecter has a weakness. Your guest room is messy, isn't it? I knew when you offered to share your bed that you were hiding something!"

And, well, Hannibal could accept that excuse. It would be easy and polite, and it would discourage Will from looking any deeper in his house for secrets.

Then again: Hannibal has never taken the easy path.

"My guest room is certainly made up if you wish to take it," he replies mildly, and Will deflates a little. "But . . ."

"But what?"

Hannibal reaches for the mask he's spent a lifetime cultivating. He schools his expression, he rounds his shoulders, he dips his tongue into the honeyed lies he tells so well. He goes to manipulate Will, to engage in his favorite game with his favorite kind of prey, to wind up and sit back and watch the sparks alight.

Hannibal says: "I find that I have gotten used to your company" and it is not a lie.

He isn't sure if he's more shocked or if Will is.

Will recovers faster. He shuffles his feet on the floor and coughs awkwardly, but there is a flush upon his cheeks and the corner of his lips are turned up. He does not storm out, he does not run away, he does not make excuses. He accepts the clothes Hannibal offers, takes full

advantage of Hannibal's ensuite bathroom, and when Hannibal emerges from his closet, he finds Will has slid into Hannibal's bed and snuggled into the corners.

The number of people Hannibal has let into his bed is very slim. His house, of course, is open to guests, for there is no better way to win friends than to pretend to open your innermost sanctuary to them, but Hannibal's basement and his bedroom are his true havens. Hannibal once made a beautiful tenderloin out of a woman who had dared to sneak into his bedroom and ogle his furniture.

Yet Will . . . Hannibal feels no anger, no irritation, no desire to plan a dinner. He feels only a bone-deep contentment, and a slight urge to tuck the blankets closer around Will.

He does not point out that there is a perfectly serviceable and rather luxurious couch. He does not politely build a barrier between them out of the dozen or so pillows he has on hand. And he does not grab separate blankets for them.

Hannibal slips into bed, breathes in the beautiful scent of happy omega, and falls asleep.

Over the next few days and weeks, they fall into a very comfortable rhythm. Hannibal and Will trade off tending to their children when the baby monitor goes off in the middle of the night. Hannibal makes them delicious meals while Will sets out tackling the yardwork. Hannibal orders a possibly embarrassing amount of childcare supplies and Will puts together the furniture, although he laughs himself sick over Hannibal's baby mobile choices. And when the day is done, they curl into the same bed, as close as lovers, and repeat the entire routine all over again.

Even the OBAR representative comments upon it, when he comes to visit. He is no longer as sickeningly condescending, perhaps because he is aware that this is Hannibal's territory and an omega with a baby can be vicious, but he still manages to be snide.

Will excuses himself at least three times to "use the restroom". Hannibal contemplates moving the alpha up in his dinner plans.

As soon as he can find a way to get Will out of the house long enough for him to go hunting, anyways.

Still, alphas are naturally prone to deferring, somewhat, to omegas in distress, especially pregnant or nursing omegas. Will is more in the type of distress that comes from wanting to punch someone than from any genuine fear, but the OBAR representative's nose interprets Will's pheromones as distress either way and he tones down his aggressiveness.

"And you've made arrangements with your alpha sire?" the OBAR representative asks as they fill in the necessary paperwork regarding their child's living situation and current pediatric physician so that OBAR can follow up.

"Yes," Hannibal says. "He agreed to forfeit all rights and custody."

The OBAR representative accepts this without question, partly because Hannibal has a signed and notarized form stating as such and partly because many alphas earn a living as a sire and don't actually wish to have a hand in raising the children. Even if OBAR did question it, the alpha Hannibal selected as a sire went on an extended vacation shortly after impregnating Hannibal and, well.

Such a pity about the international vacation crime rate, isn't it? Some people just go on vacation and are never heard from again.

"Then just sign and date that final paper, and you're all set, Mr. Lecter," the OBAR representative says. He turns to Will. "And you, Mr. Graham? Have you made any arrangements with your alpha sire?"

Will freezes like a mouse who has just looked up to find himself in the gaze of a lion. He swallows. "Uh. He works um. Really long hours? I haven't had the opportunity to speak with him since I, um, delivered." His voice is soft and submissive, his chin tucked close, his shoulders hunched in. Even his scent has changed, that soft honeyed vanilla bean contentment sharpening into bitter unripe lemon.

Hannibal's nose twitches. He knows that scent. Hannibal might sometimes, in a great long while, forget a face, but he never forgets a scent.

He spends so long staring at Will even shies away from him, for once, as if he is being judged by two lions and has nowhere to hide. Will withdraws completely, but it's not submission, not really; this is long ingrained reflexes, this is long held fear, this is something deep and dark and ugly.

Hannibal wants to bear his teeth.

The OBAR representative, sensing a weak spot, certainly does. He smiles, oil-slick and alpha-smug, and says, "Now, now, Mr. Graham. Your alpha has equal right to your child as you do if he hasn't terminated their rights. You will need to contact him if you're not planning to keep your child. He may wish to assert custody before the child is placed for adoption."

The last jars something in Will; in a flash he is a snarling mongoose again, not a sign of the quivering mouse from before. "My child is *not* being placed for adoption. I chose her. She is mine."

"Not if your alpha doesn't sign over his rights," the OBAR representative fires back.

The worst thing, Hannibal knows, is that it's true. Alphas traditionally are favored by the courts when it comes to assigning custody of and rights to children. Theoretically, this is because most higher paying jobs are held by alphas, who can then afford to provide good homes, good education, and good lives for their children. Realistically, though, it's a story as old as time, and most omegas simply don't have the money to fight off an alpha pursing custody in court.

"I'll talk to him," Will says, face drawn. "I'll just it settled."

“You do that, Mr. Graham,” the OBAR representative says condescendingly, gathering up the veritable mountain of paperwork he had had them sign. “Or OBAR will on your behalf.”

Hannibal escorts him out of the house then, because even though it’s rude, he can’t stand to have the man stinking up the air anymore. He shuts the door literally on the man’s heels and then heads straight for the kitchen, because he has learned two things about Will.

One, he does not like being cornered, so Hannibal must give him a little space.

Two, Will has a strong sweet tooth, so Hannibal has taken to keeping cookies on hand.

Hannibal comes back out of the kitchen with a plate of cookies, a tray of hot drinks, and a carefully cultivated list of scenarios and questions to ask Will.

Will, who is not on the sofa.

Will, who is not in the room.

Will, who is not anywhere on the first floor.

Hannibal checks the backyard, because Will likes to sit on the deck sometimes, sunning himself like a lizard, but the door is still firmly shut and locked, and Will, even at his angriest, would never lock himself out accidentally. Hannibal checks the rest of the first floor again, out of instinct, but when he climbs to the second floor, he heads straight to where he knows Will has likely gone to seek shelter.

Sure enough, Will is in the nursery, curled into the nest with Mischa burbling at his side and Mina suckling at his breast. They built the nest together, out of blankets and bedding, and the entire room smells solely of them and their daughters. It’s the most perfect mixture of scents Hannibal has ever smelled.

Hannibal shuts the door, crosses to the nest, and settles onto the edge of the nest. He does not speak, merely arranges the tray on the floor next to him, and waits for Will to speak.

Will finishes feeding Mina and hands her off to Hannibal to be burped and rocked before he scoops up Mischa and lets her drink her fill as well. It’s easy, simple, instinctive. It’s the routine they’ve developed over the many days and nights, and it fills Hannibal with a strange sense of peace.

And then Will speaks. “So,” he says, “I guess you have questions.”

“Only if you wish to answer them,” Hannibal answers. He can always do some discrete research later, anyways.

Will tries to smile, but it ends up looking more like a grimace. He shifts Mischa a little on his chest, so he can lean against the wall. “Guess I better tell my story then,” he says with a sigh. “So. My dad was a single parent omega. My alpha mom didn’t want anything to do with me, so my dad just took me and kept moving. We weren’t very well off, but I was happy, he was happy. We always had some food. When I presented, he tried to bake me a cake and burned it

so badly that he had to go buy some cookies from the store instead. I knew that no matter what, he loved me."

Will's scent starts to shift, then. It's not the true bitterness of anger and unhappiness that Hannibal smelled in the doctor's office or when the OBAR representative confronted him; this is the soft rain of melancholy.

Hannibal has worked in the emergency room for a long time. He has lost countless patients and comforted an endless stream of families, loved ones, and friends. He has smelled every single scent combination of grief and loss and mourning that there is. And yet, not a single scent has ever touched him the way Will's does – Hannibal wants to swaddle him in blankets, he wants to cook him every meal that makes him smile, he wants to nuzzle Will's neck and replace that aching scent of sadness with their combined scent.

He *wants* and the sensation is so astonishing that Hannibal does not know what to do.

Fortunately, Will does not notice his revelation. "My dad died when I was sixteen," Will explains, monotone and flat, the tone that comes from repeating a story a thousand times. "I got sent into foster care, because my mom didn't want me. My foster family wasn't bad, but – well. Omegas are expensive. The day after I turned eighteen, they contracted me to an alpha."

"I see."

Will shoots him an unamused look. "Do you? Because your alpha sire seems to have rolled over for you."

"I've never pretended that my wealth doesn't have its advantages," Hannibal says quietly. "And I am a count, Will. Nobility practiced the contracting of omegas and alphas as much as the common folk did."

The fight drains out of Will as quickly as air out of a popped balloon. He knows Hannibal speaks the truth. Omega rights have come a long way, but the contracting of an omega to an alpha is as old as time and, nowadays, even easier since dowries can be handled electronically instead of requiring the transfer of physical assets.

"Well, anyways," Will says, stroking Mischa's fine baby hair, "he's a very traditional alpha. The only reason I even have a job is because we needed the money for a down payment on the house. He'll never give up custody of Mina."

"Could you buy out the dowry?"

Will snorts. "My salary goes directly into his account, so no. He considers it his, uh, due for my care and housing."

Hannibal reorganizes his mental Rolodex. The OBAR representative can breathe for a little longer. It seems Hannibal has a much better candidate for his dinner table. And, even better, he can nourish Will with the flesh of someone who should have cared for and nourished him.

"Oh no, you don't," Will says abruptly, pulling Hannibal out of his thoughts.

“I beg your pardon?”

“I know that look. You are not going to go buy out my dowry for me.”

Hannibal tilts his head. “I swear to you, Will, that was not what I was thinking,” he says truthfully.

“I don’t believe you,” Will declares. “But either way: I’ll handle my alpha myself. I’ll just bring him the papers.”

“Alone? Will – ”

“It’s my alpha, and I’ll deal with it.”

“At least let me drive you,” Hannibal bargains, because Will already told him that he has no car and Hannibal shudders at the thought of putting Will in a cab.

Will looks at him, looks down at their daughters, and then looks back up. “Hannibal.”

“Will.”

In the end, Will wins the battle, if only because he points out that he wouldn’t trust anyone else to watch over their daughters. It is blatant manipulation, but Hannibal allows it, swayed by his own instincts to protect their children and a little impressed by Will’s willingness to engage in such tactics. So Hannibal calls a trusted company to arrange transportation, and then he gives Will a cellphone to remain in contact.

If Will isn’t aware that the phone’s GPS is turned on, well. That’s just another secret for Hannibal to keep.

After Will leaves, a stack of papers in hand and a determined expression on his face, Hannibal retreats upstairs to the nursery with his tablet and his recipe book. As he thumbs through different cards, considering and discarding possible options, he watches the little GPS dot move through the streets, stopping at various red lights and turning down corners. The journey takes a while – Hannibal has to get up and tend to Mina when she fusses – but eventually, the GPS dot comes to a stop at a house.

Half an hour passes. Hannibal tucks Mina back to sleep.

An hour passes. Hannibal selects a recipe.

An hour and a half passes. Hannibal discards his chosen recipe and settles upon a new one.

Two hours pass. Hannibal begins preparing dinner, although he keeps the tablet close by to monitor the GPS.

At the three hour mark, Hannibal opens his phone and begins scrolling through his contacts. There are very few he would entrust the care of his children to, but Hannibal isn’t fool

enough to consider leaving them alone. He has just landed on Alana's contact and opened it, in fact, when his tablet gives a gentle chime – Will has moved.

A long breath rushes out of Hannibal's lungs. It's not relief, not by a long shot; more like the shifting of sand as it settles upon a new dune and begins to take a new shape in the desert.

Will's alpha, after all, will still die regardless. He'll just die a little slower.

When Will walks through the door and Hannibal gets a good look at his face, Will's alpha's death gets hours slower.

"He didn't sign the papers," Will says to the floor. His tone is numb and flat; his shoulders are hunched and defensive; his scent is the bitterest thing Hannibal's ever smelled in his life. Most disturbing, though, is the bruising around his throat, especially around the mating gland. It's not a bite, not the sign of an alpha replacing his faded mating mark.

This is an attack, an aggressive show of force, a pre-emptive strike.

This is war.

Hannibal takes a deep breath and lets it out. He cannot let his anger overrule his scent, lest Will get suspicious. He pries the crumpled papers out of Will's hands and smooths them out of the table.

"Mina missed you," Hannibal tells Will. "Do you want to go up to her?"

Will's eyes are lost and far away, even though he nods on autopilot when Hannibal mentions Mina. Hannibal has to nudge him to the stairs, shepherding him like a dog, and then guide him through the bedroom into the nursery. Will doesn't perk up until he has Mina settled against his chest and Hannibal has closed the nursery door, cutting off the outside world and leaving them peacefully ensconced in their little sanctuary.

Slowly, the stench of angry alpha and distressed omega fades as the air filters kick into high gear, and eventually, all Hannibal can smell is Will, Mina, Mischa, and himself. That's when Will speaks.

"He could smell you," Will says, out of nowhere.

"Will?"

Will rocks Mina, very gently. "He could smell you, on me. He could smell Mischa too, but babies smell mostly alike. You, on the other hand . . . He thought I was cheating on him."

"If his nose is sensitive enough to smell me, then he must have known that we are not engaging in sexual relations."

"You can say sex, Hannibal," Will says, rolling his eyes. "It's not like Mina and Mischa will remember."

“Sometimes it’s better not to start habits when they’re young that we will regret when they grow up.”

Will looks up. He mouths the word “we” like he’s never heard it before. “What do you mean?”

Hannibal reaches out and strokes Mina’s skin. She stirs briefly, but after so much time spent together, she recognizes his scent the same way she recognizes Will’s, and she settles with a happy baby sound. “I would think it obvious that we do not want our children to pick up bad habits, like swearing.”

“You know what I mean, Hannibal,” Will says, eyes narrowing. “What do you mean by *we*?”

It takes only a slight shift of his hand to slide from Mina’s cheek to Will’s arm. Hannibal strokes his thumb over Will’s arm the same way he did over Mina’s cheek. It’s the same kind of casual contact that he’s slowly begun to acclimate Will to ever since they began sharing a bed, and Will stares at the meeting of their skin like it’s finally dawning upon him that Hannibal has been touching him a lot more for quite some time now.

“I mean,” Hannibal says quietly, “exactly what I said. Do you not want to raise our children with good habits?”

“You mean . . . together.”

“Yes.”

“Me and you.”

“Yes.”

“Parenting together.”

“Yes.” Hannibal stops moving his thumb and meets Will’s eyes. Will hates eye contact, but Hannibal knows he’ll understand the meaning Hannibal is trying to get across. “Do you object to that idea?”

Will laughs, helplessly. It’s a quiet laugh, so as not to wake Mina and Mischa, but tears escape from his eyes all the same. “Hannibal, I can’t – ”

“Can’t or won’t?”

All the amusement drains out of Will, leaving him looking tired and worn, just like he did when Hannibal first met him. Hannibal has worked so hard to ensure that he is well fed, well rested, and happy, and he resents that all of his progress has been so easily erased. Will’s smiles have been getting more common, nowadays, and Hannibal has enjoyed them immensely.

“You know my alpha won’t allow it.”

“He doesn’t own you.”

“Not officially. But he does have a say in how Mina is raised,” Will points out. “And he certainly has a say in how I parent. He was . . . enraged . . . to say the least, at the idea that we nursed our children together.”

“Is that how you ended up with such colorful bruising?”

“Hannibal,” Will says. He blows out a breath and extends his legs, until they brush against Hannibal’s. “I would happily live here and raise Mina with you. But. I have a job. And I have an alpha. And neither will release me. He’s given me three days to move back in.”

Hannibal raises an eyebrow. Three days is not a lot of time.

Then again, Hannibal has worked with less.

“I will have to work swiftly, then,” Hannibal says out loud, moving to stand up.

Will eyes him suspiciously. “Work to do what?”

“Convince him to change his mind, of course,” Hannibal tells him smoothly, and leaves the nursery before Will can scramble to his feet and follow.

He has a dinner to catch, after all.

In the end, Will’s alpha does sign the paperwork. The signature is a bit shaky, but then again, any alpha signing over custody of their child and freedom for their omega partner would be a bit nervous.

Hannibal’s blade at the alpha’s nether regions also probably contributed to the shaking, but no one needs to know that.

Hannibal has no interest in drawing it out after that, so he quickly dispatches the alpha. He has a partner and two children to feed at home, after all.

It is very dark when Hannibal returns home, trunk full of fresh meat and several suitcases of clothing. There is no light on downstairs or upstairs and it’s certainly past Mina and Mischa’s bedtime, so Hannibal quickly and quietly stows everything back in its proper place. It’s actually a relief to get back to using his tools to clean and cut apart the meat; he abstained from hunting regularly with Mina and Mischa and Will, and he soon falls back into the rhythm of selecting good recipes and carving out the assorted sections of flesh.

He is in the middle of vacuum sealing a rather lovely part of thigh – Will’s alpha was a runner, apparently – when a voice rings out behind him.

“And here I thought you just had another rich person hideaway down here,” Will says, sounding amused.

Hannibal pauses. Plans flash through his mind: killing Will (absolutely unacceptable), knocking Will out and holding him captive (difficult), lying about what is happening (very,

very difficult). The alternative is just telling Will the truth but, well.

He clears his throat. “Do I need to call my lawyer, Will?”

“Depends on what you tell me,” Will replies, just as carefully.

His voice shifts as he speaks, as if he’s circling Hannibal like a great shark around his prey. Yet Hannibal does not hear the movement of his feet or the sound of his clothes – that must be how Will caught him off guard, although he still doesn’t know how Will discovered the secret door.

Hannibal finishes sealing the bit of thigh, so that the meat doesn’t spoil. “I am butchering a pig. You enjoy fresh pork and bacon, and I am very careful about what I serve us.”

“A pig with rather long legs.”

“He certainly got his fair share of exercise. And that will be reflected in the quality of the meat.”

Will hums. “And what butcher is open this late?”

“Oh, my butcher is willing to work with my availability. I pay him rather well, after all.”

“Does your butcher supply . . . all of your meat?”

“I am a loyal customer.”

Will comes around the table then. He’s dressed in loose fitting pants – one of Hannibal’s, he’s pleased to note. He smells faintly of baby and milk from nursing their children. He also has the strangest look on his face, like he’s holding in a burp.

“Seriously, Hannibal,” Will says, slapping a hand on the nearest piece of meat. “Really? That’s your cover story?”

“I’m afraid I don’t – ”

Which is when Will bursts into laughter, and Hannibal realizes that Will’s strange constipated face was him trying desperately not to laugh.

“You knew,” Hannibal says.

Will rolls his eyes. “I am a profiler. Of course I knew. You tick every box. Plus you just confirmed it.”

Hannibal searches Will’s face. Apparently he can’t read Will as well as he thought he did, but he senses no disgust, no horror, no fear. He doesn’t smell it either. All he sees on Will’s face is exasperation and amusement.

But then again: Hannibal has been fooled before.

“So,” Hannibal repeats, watching every single twitch on Will’s face, “do I need to call my lawyer?”

“Only if you keep me up much longer. It’s cold in bed without you.” Will heads towards the stairs, only stopping to call out, “Also it’s your turn the next time our babies fuss!”

Warmth blooms inside of Hannibal’s chest. It’s one thing for Will to know; Hannibal has long quietly began making half-hearted plans to reveal himself to Will so that he can be truly and fully seen. But it’s quite another to plan for being seen – and instead to be seen because of Will’s cleverness, and not Hannibal’s manipulation.

And for Will to still want him in their bed, caring for their children?

Hannibal tidies up the rest of the meat in short order.

After a nice long shower, Hannibal slides into their bed. Will welcomes him with a sleepy snuffle and warm arms. They lie together, dozing in the darkness, when Will suddenly rouses.

“Did he beg?”

Hannibal strokes Will’s hair. “Yes.”

Will sighs, pure satisfaction radiating in his scent. “Did you make him sign the paperwork?”

“Yes. And he told his boss that he would be taking a long vacation to find himself after the dissolution of his relationship.”

Will yawns. “You do work fast.”

“I’m surprised you don’t object. Working for the FBI and all that.”

“Eh, I’m a consultant. And besides . . . there’s no law against butchering pigs,” Will says, a world of meaning in that one word.

“No, there is not.”

They kiss then, for the first time but certainly not the last, and Hannibal sees the future stretching out before them: moving in together, raising their children together, and a beautiful wedding ceremony for all to see. It’s nothing he would have imagined when he received his summons from OBAR – but without it, he would not have met Will.

And Will and their children are worth everything.

FINIS

End Notes

A/N: And after that, Will and Hannibal raise their children together as a mated pair. People either raise eyebrows at the ~unusual couple~ or praise Hannibal for supporting his friend in his time of need. The FBI never do find Will's alpha. And Mischa and Mina are best friends forever.

HUGE THANKS to the mods of the Hannigram A/B/O Big Bang! TigerPrawn, you were amazing and Finally, thanks to my friends who cheered me on while writing this.

All typos and continuity errors are mine. This fic was written entirely by me going "wheeeeee" and gleefully putting words to text, no outlining or planning involved.

Finally, check out the other amazing works in the A/B/O Big Bang collection!

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